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SUBJECT: KUWAIT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HOLDS FIRST NATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON IPR PROTECTION

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) hosted a two-day national conference on Protection of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) on June 9 and 10. The conference included seminars and roundtable discussions that brought together IPR experts from the private and public sectors. This event attracted significant media coverage, particularly the opening ceremony which the Ambassador attended. Improving IPR protection to foster greater innovation and entrepreneurship in Kuwait was the main theme of this event. Although most government officials spoke about progress made by the GOK in IPR protection, many private sector experts and practitioners lamented the country's inconsistent and often ineffective enforcement standards. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCI) U/S Rasheed al-Tabtabaie was the key-note speaker at the opening ceremony. He highlighted recent progress made by MOCI in stepping up IPR enforcement. He also emphasized that MOCI, the Ministry of Information and the Public Authority for Industry (PAI) are all working on amendments to laws that would impose stricter penalties and provide greater protection for IPR in Kuwait. Although he did not specify a timeframe, Tabtabaie expressed confidence that these laws would be in effect soon. He also praised Customs officials for increasing their efforts along with the MOCI enforcement teams. KCCI was represented at the opening ceremony by its treasurer, Salah al-Marzouq, who pointed out that Kuwait has been protecting IPR since it gained independence in 1961 and that Kuwait has been a member of WIPO since 1988.

¶3. (U) Ministry of Interior U/S LTG Ahmed al-Rojaib spoke about MOI enforcement efforts, pointing out that as of April 2008 MOI has recorded more than 289,000 seizures of counterfeit items including computer software, CDs, DVDs, books, clothing and electronic and electrical products. Business Software Alliance (BSA) Chairman Jawad Al-Redha, in contrast, argued that despite GOK efforts, piracy is growing in Kuwait and in the GCC. He urged the GOK to implement stricter penalties for violators to ensure that the work of Kuwaiti artists and innovators is protected and fostered. He highlighted BSA's collaboration with governments in the GCC to spread awareness among the general public about IPR protection and the detrimental effects of piracy on local economies.

¶4. (U) Other sessions included government officials from the Ministry of Justice, MOCI Trade Office, Ministry of Information, and the Kuwait National Library. Lack of public awareness was cited as the primary reason for growing piracy in Kuwait. Ministry of Justice officials presented a working paper on the need for public awareness campaigns through media outreach programs on IPR. The working paper explained that Kuwaitis need to understand the protections available to them. Both public and private sector experts agreed to work together to raise IPR awareness through collaborative PR campaigns.

Comment

15. (SBU) Although this conference did not produce any substantive results or solve specific problems with IPR protection in Kuwait, it notably raised the profile of IPR issues in Kuwait. The conference followed a brunch session on IPR hosted by the American Kuwaiti Alliance (AKA) in May. Embassy Econoff participated in the AKA panel and spoke on the current state of IP protection in Kuwait and the role of the USG in protecting IPR. KCCI, the largest and only official chamber in Kuwait, was able to bring together high-level government officials and private sector leaders on this topic and attract considerable media reaction. Whether this conference will lead to public awareness campaigns on IPR or speed up the passage on new IP laws remains to be seen, but it represents a step in the right direction.

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